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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6418

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 000895

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2018

TAGS: PGOVPOL PREL I2

SUBJECT: NEXT STEPS ON PROVINCIAL POWERS

REF: A. BAGHDAD O-I 3/19/08

IB. BAGHDAD O-I 3/13/08

Classified By: Political Counselor Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

I1. (C) On March 19, 2008 the Presidency Council released a statement announcing that after deliberations with the leaders of the Council of Representatives (CoR) and party blocs, it has unanimously decided to withdraw its objections to the Provincial Powers Law (or PPL; see ref A). It is our understanding that Vice President Abdel Mehdi agreed to withdraw his veto if the CoR leadership pledged to amend the PPL before provincial elections are held, although the exact nature of any amendments to the law remain an open question. The PPL will now be sent to the Ministry of Justice for publication in the Official Gazette. The PPL requires the CoR to pass a provincial elections law no later than May 13 (90 days after the PPL was passed) and hold provincial elections by October 1, 2008.

I2. (C) Given that the CoR has already taken over a month long recess (February 14-March 25), this schedule is extremely ambitious -- MPs will have only five to six weeks to deliberate on the elections law. Deputy Chair of the Legal Committee Salim Jibouri (IIP/Tawafuq) told PolOffs on February 13 the CoR has not even received a draft from the GOI of the provincial elections law (ref B). Keeping the CoR's passage of the elections law on track will be key to meeting the October 1 deadline for provincial elections. The PPL will enter into force on the date it is published in the gazette, but most of its provisions will not be applicable until after the elections of new provincial councils are held, according to Article 55 of the law.

CROCKER